

## POPULARIZING EPIC NARRATIVE IN GEORGE R.R. MARTIN'S *A GAME OF THRONES*

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### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan mendiskripsikan bagaimana menghidupkan epos pada awal abad ke-21 melalui kajian cerita fantasi epos fenomenal Amerika, *A Game of Thrones*. Sejalan dengan perkembangan manusia yang semakin mengandalkan rasionalitas, epos yang jauh dari rasionalitas seharusnya hilang dari kehidupan masyarakat. Akan tetapi, pada masa sekarang ini epos masih berpengaruh kuat dalam masyarakat, seperti yang ditunjukkan oleh cerita fantasi *A Game of Thrones* karya George R.R. Martin, seorang penulis yang dikategorikan sebagai salah seorang yang paling berpengaruh di dunia tahun 2011. Penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan genre dan semiotika ini bersimpulan bahwa ada unsur-unsur fantasi yang kental dalam formula dan arketipnya. Dalam memenuhi selera pembaca, formula dibangun melalui representasi rasional dan kombinasi yang tepat antara konvensi dan invensi. Dari analisis konvensi dan invensi ini, penelitian juga menunjukkan adanya hubungan yang erat antara mitos dan cara hidup masyarakat meskipun dalam dunia modern sekalipun.

**Kata Kunci:** epos, genre, fantasi, legenda, mitos, populer

### ABSTRACT

This research is intended to show the sustainability of epic in latest years of human history through the most phenomenal fantasy in American literature, *A Game of Thrones*. Along with the capability of human beings in thinking clearly and sensibly, it is commonsensical that people tend to free themselves from irrationality. The reality shows, however, that the existence of epic fantasy still has power in appealing audiences or readers. This is the case with *A Game of Thrones* written by George R.R. Martin who was given the award of One of The Most Influential People in 2011 by *Time* magazine. This qualitative research, using genre approach, finds out that in order to be compatible with today's society, an epic seen in *A Game of Thrones*, which is commonly known as a story centering on the legendary hero and his heroic deed in oral folk tradition, keeps its power as an epic fantasy narrative through certain archetypes and formulas. Through genre analysis using semiotic approach, the research brings about conclusions that the elements of high fantasy, elements built through rational representation, and a smart combination of convention and invention brings about its popularity. It is also concluded that there is a close relationship between the myth and the mode of people living even in the most modern context.

**Keywords:** epic, genre, high fantasy, legend, myth, popular

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## INTRODUCTION

Along with the development of how people live, think and feel, change in every aspect of life is inevitable. This also concerns with values, aesthetic criteria, taste, and methods on how people make justification over something. Literary work of art also experiences the same as confirmed by Gans (1974: 70-71) and Davis (1992: 9-10). Lakoff and Scherr (1984: 29) also point out: "Beauty is defined by those in power, and as the possession of power shifts, beauty will vary with it. Since what is beautiful at any time and place is determined by the vagaries of fashion, it is unpredictable and not based on any sort of universal aesthetic." This change can be clearly seen in popular literary genre.

This becomes more important when dealing with epic. Epic is a work of literature or film having heroic deeds as its subject matter (<http://dictionary.reference.com>). An epic regarded as a story of the ancient life can be said as moving away far from modern life. It is even moving farther from today's reality when the epic is dramatized in fantasy genre which is known as a story dealing with non-reality. How can a work dealing with non-reality and taking place in the old days still fascinate audience knowing from the popularity of epic fantasy like *A Game of Thrones* by George R.R. Martin.

This novel is actually part of a series entitled *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Although the novel series is planned to comprise seven books, only five of them are available. They are: *A Game of Thrones*, *A Clash of Kings*, *A Storm of Swords*, *A Feast of Crows*, and *A Dance with Dragons*. These novels are adapted into TV series *Game of Thrones*, the first season of which debuted in the U.S. on April 2011. *Game of Thrones*, which is still aired in three seasons, is well received by the public and nominated and won numerous awards. Season 1 won Emmy Awards as the Outstanding Drama Series and Best Television Series—Drama at 69<sup>th</sup> Golden Globe Awards. The second season is adapted from the second book of *A Song of Ice and Fire* novels namely *A Clash of Kings* which is aired on HBO on April 2012.

*A Game of Thrones* is the first book of Martin's series entitled *A Song of Ice and Fire*. It comprises 759 pages in 73 chapters. Although the novel won several awards, it was not until 2011 that the story became a New York Time Best Seller. This can be said as a result of HBO television series that premiered in April, 2011. The question raised, then, is how can the novel become popular 15 years after it was first published. Is it because the novel meets the taste of today's readers while it could not in the year of its publication? Or is it because the inviting power of the book that results from other factors than the book itself? Knowing from the fact that Martin began writing the novel in 1991, we can then raise a question: how could he possibly grasp the idea of making such epic fantasy? What kind of convention did he make use of? What invention did he create that makes the novel fulfill today's readers' need? Those become the research questions on which this study is based.

With the development of the internet, the novel is also adapted into a social network games like strategy board game, role playing games, and collectible card games. The Best Traditional Board Game was also awarded in 2003. Besides the success of television series adaptation, the novel was also made into comic. When *A Game of Thrones* successfully penetrates the market and becomes a source of inspiration for many people to produce more adaptations, the question raised then is: what is it in *A Game of Thrones* that can move people to consume it? This is also an important question to answer. Therefore, the research objective is formulated as follows: (1) to examine what kind of formula are used in the epic fantasy *A Game of Thrones* and (2) to investigate the reasons behind its popularity, and to make justification on the cultural behavior or universal pattern that may underlie its popularity.

When dealing with popular genre, one cannot place his or her mind in literary world tradition, as genre in popular literature is fluid, running through with the development of what people like and dislike. It can be even said that since genre much depends on readers there is no static criteria of a



genre. This assumption is based on the fact that first, there is no commonly recognized definition of popular literary genre as critics use the word to refer to anything they want and there is often disagreement among them. This argument marks that study on popular literature as intended in this research is important to be carried out.

The inclination toward epic narrative can be seen in the emergence of a lot of epic novels, films, and television series since the year 2000. Along with Martin's *A Game of Thrones*, for example, are Steven Erickson's *The Malazan Book of the Fallen* which consists of eight books, J.R.R. Tolkien's trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*, which became popular in the year 2000s through film series although the novel was written in 1950s, *The Gladiator*, *The Prince of Persia*, *Clash of the Titans*, and others. The occurrence of abundant epic fantasy narratives shows that this kind of story still has appealing power in society. Those facts bring about an argument that there must be reasons behind such popular tendency.

Epic literature originally comes from the oral tradition of ancient civilization in the form of poetry and commonly presented in narrative, dramatic, and lyric forms. The famous examples of epic narrative poems in English literature are John Milton's "Paradise Lost", Lord Byron's "Don Juan", and anonymous Beowulf. It is commonly known that the epic literature can be in several different genres such as war epics, historical epics, romantic epic, science fiction epics, and fantasy epics. Such categorization of epic, however, is based on historical observation rather than established definition of a genre or sub-genre.

*A Game of Thrones* can be categorized as having fantasy genre. Fantasy is defined as a type of stories that deals with non-reality. Since other genre like science fiction or horror can also deal with non-reality, a clear-cut definition of a genre is not easy to formulate. Therefore, if epic fantasy genre is popular, it must have an important position in the society, "it becomes a matter of *cultural behavior* that calls for explanation along with cultural patterns" (Cawelti, 1976: 21). Hall also proposes a definition of

'popular' as "forms and activities which have their roots in the social and material conditions of particular classes, which have been embodied in popular traditions and practices" (Hall, 1998: 449)

With regard to popular literature, several theories underlying this study are put forward. Popular literature as a product of popular culture is often "authorless" (Mukerji, 1991: 50). This means that the most important element in popular literature is why and how the popular literary works reach the public. Dealing with popular narratives, Kaminsky (1974: 214) points out that anything to do with popular narratives, "its popularity is not mystical. It ... corresponds to an interest, even a need of viewing public."

Since *A Game of Thrones* is proved to have the capability of attracting wide readers, it must operate within a system or a structure understandable to the readers. Although the story is an epic fantasy whose epic is fictive, it can, one way or another, reflect common cultural belief as Metz, one of the most important theoreticians in film semiotics, says:

The *Plausible*, I said, is cultural and arbitrary: I mean that the line of division between the possibilities it excludes and those it retains (and even promotes socially) varies considerably according to the country, the period, the art, and the genre (1974b: 244).

Relating what Metz states and the popularity of *A Game of Thrones*, it can be argued that the novel must reflect culturally held beliefs or common universal values and taste. In order to find out such reflection, the investigation first of all should deal with the elements or the formulas of the story as intended in this research.

Investigating formula of popular literary works, the research then operates within genre analysis. The word "genre" generally means kind or classification and it is generally used in literary world referring to literary forms like prose, poetry, and drama. In its development, it experiences variations depending on, for example, themes, forms, characterizations etc. Wellek and Warren states:



Genre should be conceived, we think, as a grouping of literary works based, theoretically, upon both outer form (specific metre or structure) and also upon inner form (attitude, tone, purpose—more crudely, subject and audience). The ostensible basis may be one or the other (e.g. "pastoral" dan "satire" for the inner form: dipodic verse and Pincaric code for the outer), but the critical problem will then be to find the other dimension, to complete the diagram" (1956: 231).

If genre means categorization, the question then is what kind of classification does popular literature belong to? Genre in popular fiction is "subject to constant process of change and adaptation. Because different audiences will use a genre in different ways at different times, its boundaries can never be rigidly defined, and at the same time it is susceptible to extensive subdivision" (Maltby, 1995: 108). The category of a genre, therefore, is made by the readers as Tudor (1986: 7) states that genre "is what [people] collectively believe it to be". As long as it is concerned with the reader, the categorization of a certain genre is difficult because genres are flexible. Genre "becomes an ever changing and evolving concept" (Basinger, 1994: 108) as readers' taste is always changing along with the development of the society.

Genres are so varied that Fowler (1989: 216) even argues that there are so many unidentified genres. According to Chandler (1997:68) "The classification and hierarchical taxonomy of genres is not a neutral and objective procedure". Therefore, genre in popular fiction according to one source can be different from other source as Feuer (1992: 144) states: "A genre is ultimately an abstract conception rather than something that exists empirically in the world.". According to Tasker (1993:55) "Genre is in fact a mobile category, and the bounds of generic purity cannot be clearly drawn within an industrial context which is constantly developing, shifting the terms of popular narrative."

Dealing popular narrative, Kaminsky (1985: 226) states: "Each genre has its roots in myth" From this statement, it can be argued, in epic fantasy narrative, there must be certain elements

that show the continuance of the myth. Nevertheless, myth and genres also rise and fall in cultural favor (Slotkin, 1985: 2). On the concepts of myth and genre, Slotkin defines them as follows:

*Myth* has to do with the continuity of meanings: the transmission from generation to generation of a characteristic ideology or system of beliefs and values, embodied in a continuously evolving set of narrative fictions and a language of symbols. *Genre* has to do with the continuity of forms: the persistence and the development, from generation to generation, of particular ways of telling or transmitting stories, making symbols, structuring systems of representation. The concept of myth directs our attention toward the ways in which our material and social history shapes our cultural productions (1990: 1).

Liszka (1989: 164) points out: "a myth is a symbolic, idealized representation of the social reality to which it is organically related. Society is not symbolic order. Rather, society is the reality from which and for which mythologies engender representation." He further states: "myth is a product of society and the means by which the society recreates itself in symbolic form" (Liszka, 1989:165). Barthes dealing with myth today perceives: "...myth is a system of communication, that it is a message. This allows one to perceive that myth cannot possibly be an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form. Later, we shall have to assign to this form historical limits, conditions of use, and reintroduce society to it..." (1972:109).

Based upon such statements, this research then uses semiotic approach as a means of making justification because "meaning is not 'transmitted' to us, we actively create it according to a complex interplay of codes or conventions of which we are normally unaware" (Chandler, 2007:11). Through Barthes's concept of myth, it can be argued that myth is an irregular system because it is based on the construction already existing before and myth is second-order semiological system (1972: 114).

Besides semiotic approach, genre perspectives is also used as an approach.



Therefore there are two analyses carried out here, genre and semiotic analyses, each of which uses a different approach. One approach complements the other, producing a more complete and complex analyses. Therefore, no single approach is more important than the other. By using a semiotic approach the research is intended to show how messages are constructed in order to explain how *A Game of Thrones* embodies meaning and how this meaning is transmitted, signified, to the readers. The genre approach is used to explore the historical and syntactical meaning of the epic fantasy genre.

This is qualitative research. Approaching data qualitatively or interpretively has "reflective" characteristics in nature because qualitative approach places the researcher as the subject in interpreting data. Therefore, interpreting data is closely related to researchers's interpretation. In theoretical tradition, this research is put in interpretivism perspective underlying symbolic interaction. In other words, this research is placed in semiotic perspective.

This qualitative research is textual analysis in nature. As textual analysis, this study investigates how the popular novel *A Game of Thrones* makes meaning in the formulation of epic fantasy genre. The formulation of the genre is expected to find out how the novel becomes popular. The primary data in this research is the popular novel *A Game of Thrones*. As the novel is imaginative creation or fictive narration, factual evidence is used as secondary or supplementary data. The supplementary data which are useful in the signification includes both written, printed, or audio-visual media which are available in libraries, archives, and centers for visual history in the form of, for example, posters, photos, magazines, and music.

Using the model offered by Glaser and Strauss (1985: 64-68) in grounded research, the research processed the data taken from the popular novel *A Game of Thrones* by ordering the formula in the story in terms of epic fantasy to see the similarities and differences. The categories made depend on the intended

analysis. For the purpose of genre analysis, the categories fall into theme, setting, icon, motif, and other formula of the novel, whereas for semiotic analysis, the data were made into units of signifiers, signified and signs of both first-order and second order of semiological system as proposed by Barthes.

The genre analysis is carried out with syntactic approach. According to Webster New World Dictionary, the term syntactic which is usually used in linguistic context means "the arrangement of words as elements in a sentence to show their relationship". In the context of popular literary studies, however, "syntactic view privileges the structures into which they are arranged" (Altman, 1986: 30). Such method of analysis is intended to lead to an understanding of *A Games of Thrones* as the work in question and explore the reasons for the persistence and change of myths, types, forms, and formulas. In studying the genre, therefore, this research is intended to provide a framework of the formula of epic fantasy genre.

Since formulas, as it is other form of myth, deal with conventions rather than inventions (Cawelti, 1971: 27-29), this genre analysis means searching for the conventions and inventions in the epic fantasy genre. The conventions investigated will show the regularities in the genre, while inventions found will show changes. In other word, this analysis is like using a historical approach. It is conducted by cataloguing common traits, characters, attitudes, settings, themes, and motifs in *A Game of Thrones*.

In carrying out semiotic analysis, two semiological systems proposed by Barthes is chosen as a method of making justification. On semiotics, Barthes points out:

There are two semiological systems, one of which is staggered in relation to the other: a linguistic system, the language (or the modes of representation which are assimilated to it), which I shall call the *language-object*, because it is the language which myth gets hold of in order to build its own system; and a myth itself, which I shall call *metalanguage*, because it is a second language, in which one speaks about



the first. When he reflects on a metalanguage, the semiologist no longer needs to ask himself questions about the composition of the language object, he no longer has to take into account the details of the linguistic schema; he will only need to know its total term, or global sign, and only in as much as the term lends itself to myth (1972: 115)

The theories above underlie the methods of analysis to determine signification of the popular novel. As the approach suggests, in carrying out semiotic analysis, making meaning of the image presented in order to read the myth, this research uses related product consumed by the society like, for example, magazines, posters, albums. The observable phenomenon in the society is used to discover the regularities of the phenomenon in question. These regularities are expected to predict or explains some relationship in terms of how *A Game of Thrones* builds itself in such a way that enable it to become popular.

#### THE ARCHETYPAL ECHOES OF HIGH FANTASY

*A Game of Thrones*, the first of book of Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, is a story about how noble houses fight for the throne. The novel consists of 759 pages in prologue and 73 chapters, each of which is presented in different points of view and is entitled by the name of the main characters. The story consists of three plot lines that are arranged not in orderly way but connected one way or another around the war over gaining the throne of the Seven Kingdom. The plot of the first story line is about the house of Stark, a noble house led by Eddard Stark. The second story is about princess Daenerys, a princess of an old royal family and the third story is about the illegitimate son of Eddard Stark, named Jon Snow who dedicates his life protecting the civilized Seven Kingdom in special military order called the Night's Watch.

The plot of the three stories is seen not connected to each other although one way or another there are dialogues mentioning the relations. The seemingly unconnected chapters of each story line add to the intricate story line.

Each story line is not arranged chronologically. Chapter entitled "Tyrion", for example, is based on the point of view of Tyrion who belongs of the noble house of Lannister. Since the Lannisters is the antagonist of the Starks, this family does not build the story line in itself. This also adds the complication of the story. The existence of Daenerys is like inter-chapter sketches and so is the existence of Jon Snow, who is an illegitimate son of Eddard Stark. These all make the plot like film scenario rather than a novel. If the narrative is in the form of a film, it would be easier to understand since visual representation is easy to understand but not so if it is told in verbal form.

If fantasy is defined as a type of story that deals with non-reality narrative, the complicated story lines seem to serve the first requirements of a fantasy genre. The more complicated the more it looks beyond ordinary life. This assumption may contradict the nature of popular narratives which are usually simple in order to be understood easily. Adi's research on action movies of 1990s concludes that Americans tend to watch film which needs more brain activities because it often uses terms or issues that are not commonly applied by ordinary people (2008:75). It means the readers demand that their intelligence is engaged in the narration. This can also answer why *A Game of Thrones* gain the Best Seller after 15 years of publication when people become more educated and well learned.

While fantasy deal with non-reality, epic fantasy deals with non-reality in the past. Both the setting of place and time of *A Game of Thrones* also follow this formula epic fantasy genre. The place does not live in reality, for example " 'my speech may be Tyroshi, and my garb Datriki, but I am of Westeros, of the Sunset Kingdom' Dany told him" (Martin, 1997: 542). The imaginary places are named in such away that cannot be associated with reality. The setting of time is made as if taking place hundreds of years ago. There is no exact definition of the years. In the appendix of the novel, the years of the first generation of Targaryen is mentioned. "dated by years after Aegon's landing; 1-31 Aegon I: Aegon the Conqueror, Aegon the Dragon; 37-48 Aerys



I: Son of Aegon and Raenys; ... 262-283 Aerys II: The Mad King, only son to Jackerys ... The Last Targaryens" (Martin 1997: 756-759). In the narrative, the description of the years is provided in implicit way, for example:

The Targaryens are the blood of the dragon, descended from the high lords of the ancient freehold of Valerya, their heritage proclaimed in a striking (some say inhuman) beauty, with lilac or indigo or violet eyes and hair of silver-gold or platinum white (Martin, 1997: 756)

The house of Targaryens is the oldest generation in the story, whereas the house of the Starks is a generation when the story is told. It is described: "The Starks trace their descent from Brandon the Builder and the ancient kings of winter. For thousand of years they ruled from Winterfell as kings in the North" (Martin, 1997: 739). Such description is indeed beyond rationality but it should be created in order to meet the fantasy of the epic genre.

The convention of epic fantasy genre or commonly regarded as having high fantasy formula is in the form of the existence of magical animal like dragon. However, unlike in other fantasy story, dragon, other magical animal or magical power usually appear from the beginning of the story and exist along with the development of the story, like in *The Lord of Ring*, *Eragon*, and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. In *A Game of Thrones*, however, the dragon appear almost in the end of the story when Daenerys burns herself in the flame with the dead Khal Drogo, her husband, and fossilized dragon egg due to prove her loyalty to her dead husband.

... the logs exploding as the fire touched their secret hearts. She heard the screams of frightened horses, and the voices of the Dothraki raised in shouts of fear and terror, and Ser Jorah calling her name and cursing. No, she wanted to shout to him, no, my good knight, do not fear for me. The fire is mine. I am Daenerys Stormborn, daughter of dragons, bride of dragons, mother of dragons, don't you see? Don't you SEE? ... The third crack was as loud and sharp as the breaking of the world. ... She was naked, covered with soot, her

clothes turned to ash, her beautiful hair all crisped away ... yet she was unhurt. The cream-and-gold dragon was suckling at her left breast, the green-and-bronze at the right. ... and for the first time in hundreds of years, the night came alive with the music of dragons (Martin, 1997: 734-735)

The appearance of the magical dragon almost at the end of the story is the innovation of the writer. Wolf, which conventionally appeared in fantasy genre also exists in the story. The frightful big white wolf is the symbol of Stark family. Every Stark's child is given a wolf by the father but unlike wolves which have magical power as commonly found in fantasy and horror genre, these wolves are ordinary although it has extraordinary strength. The existence of prophetic dream, creepy atmosphere, women foretelling the future, and incest is also a way in making the story like epic fantasy genre. When compared with *The Lord of The Ring*, *A Game of Thrones* can be regarded as epic genre rather than an epic fantasy because of the lack of magic and other super-natural power.

As commonly found in epic fantasy fiction, the fundamental features of *A Game of Thrones* lie in spectacular scenes of the setting and situation. That is why the setting often takes outside the ordinary life in order to heighten the intensity of the fantasy. This can be seen, for example, in the description of the castle.

The chamber was richly furnished. Myrish carpets covered the floor instead of rushes, and in one corner a hundred fabulous beasts cavorted in bright paints on a carved screen from the Summer Isles. The walls were hung with tapestries from Norvos and Qohor and Lys, and a pair of Valyrian sphinxes flanked the door, eyes of polished garnet smoldering in black marble faces. (Martin, 1997:184)

An epic fantasy genre is like adventure genre which deals with heroes who are responsible to overcome problems. The hero is commonly described as strong, full of muscle, who fights against villain and at the end wins the princess. In *A Game of Thrones*, however, such hero is



absent. The only hero with such criteria falls into Eddard Stark, the Lord of Winterfell but Martin puts him dead at the beginning of the story. The rest of the main characters cannot be regarded as ones. In other words, it can be said that Martin moves away from the convention of traditional epic fantasy genre because the narrative does not focus on one specific hero with his effort in saving the world. He builds the image of good characters through comparison with the villains. Both good characters and bad characters, however, has heroic characteristics and bad ones. This makes *A Game of Thrones* move beyond the tradition of epic fantasy genre. Like what the title suggest, the story stresses the idea war in winning the thrones. As far as the motif of action is power and authority, it is hard to distinguish the characteristics of the hero or the villain.

Martin's *A Game of Thrones* is not like other epic fantasy narratives such as, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Eragon*, *The Lord of The Ring*, and *Harry Potter*. The distinctive difference lies in the most important narrative formula: the quest of the hero, fighting between the hero and the villain, the motif of the hero to take action, and the triumph of the hero. In *A Game of Thrones*, there is no particular hero having a quest, taking journey, fighting the villain and becomes triumphant. The character seemingly meets the criteria of the epic fantasy hero in this context is Jon Snow. He has a quest and takes journey to accomplish his mission but his motif is only protecting his family, a motif which is regarded simpler than the motif of common epic fantasy hero. Moreover, the story does not center on him, he is among other heroes in the story. Therefore, he cannot be regarded as meeting the requirement of traditional epic fantasy hero.

The distinctive innovation that Martin makes is in the role of women. The women dominate the whole points of view. Generally, epic narratives have formula of action genre. The roles and characteristics of women can also be traced in the depiction of women in narratives of action genre. The result of investigation shows that there are two characteristics. These depend on the role she is playing. When her role as the major

character in epic narrative of legendary heroine, she can have masculine characteristics, but when she is put in epic fantasy narratives, she is depicted as having feminine characteristics. For example, female France legend heroine Joan of Arc who has inspired an industry with more than 20,000 books and 50 films (Chrisafis, 2007) is portrayed as masculine-like woman. Adi in her research on action films of 1990s also marks the importance of androgenous representation. Women in action films are becoming more masculine. Mostly short hair, strong muscle, silent, and rarely smile woman signify this (2008:148). In *A Game of Thrones*, such hybridity is negated when dealing with woman representation although she has male characteristics such as brave, domineering, powerful, and free.

The global challenge on the role of woman does not change the sexual roles in epic fantasy genre. In *A Game of Thrones*, there is a clear code of value and sexual roles with masculine dominance. Father's role cannot be like mother in Indonesian community by taking care of children and cooking, for example. Although a girl has freedom to say her opinion and a daughter is treated the same as a son in the family, a father is a patriarchy with clear rules and lines of authority. The demand of gender equality is described in different way in the story. Although she may have a strong authority over the country, she cannot escape to show her femininity. This can be seen in the portrayal of two strong women in the story: the queen, Cersei Lannister and Catelyn, the wife of Ned Stark. Martin's innovation on the role of women in his epic fantasy narrative seems to answer reading public. Altman (1982:14) comments the phenomena in 1982: "the expectation that the growth of gay self-assertion would lead to a much greater degree of androgyny and blurring of sex roles seems, at least for the moment, to have been an illusion." The blurring sex roles is also applied in male characters of *A Game of Thrones*. Androgyny look, as seen in some characters, also become reader's identification and desire in epic fantasy.



## THE URGE OF RATIONAL REPRESENTATION

When a piece of literary work popular, it must operate within a system or a structure understandable to the readers. Epic fantasy novel like *A Game of Thrones* is not exceptional. Since epic fantasy deals with non-reality and dramatizes something in the past in which it is commonly supported with non-realistic formula, making it understandable needs serious effort of the writer. After investigating throughout *A Game of Thrones*, it is found out the fictive formulas of the epic fantasy should be put in context. It means such formula should be arranged in relation with other formulas without violating the common sense. The representation cannot violate the laws of logic.

In *A Game of Thrones*, like any other epic fantasy novel, the sequence of cause and effect plays an important role in creating reasonable narrative. Martin's concern with this issue is seen, first of all, in the representation of the maps of The North and The South in the beginning of the story and the genealogy of the noble houses in the appendix. Although the story also deals with the areas of West and East, they are not given maps. The absence of those two maps even creates a more convincing story. The story does not look mechanical. It is only in those two important areas that should be taken into account. The genealogy of the houses seems to convince the reader of the existence of the epic. Although not all characters appeared in the genealogy have role in the story, in which some of them are not even mentioned in the story, their presence in the lineage makes the epic looks reliable. This may conclude that it is not only the presence that can create the story convincing but also the absence.

Other factors in celebrating reasoning power is through language, names, vivid visualization, and a balance between strange elements and familiar elements. It is common sense that in a world, which does not exist, there is also a strange language used by the people living in that world. The people inhabit the world should also acquire different names. However, if the language

invented is so strange, it cannot be understood by the reader. Therefore, Martin does not create language which is too far from reality. The efforts making it like epic fantasy lies only in the diction. Martin's effort in creating this can be seen, for example,

Dany smiled. 'My son has his name, but I will try your summerwine,' she said in Valyrian, Valyrian as they spoke it in the Free Cities. The words felt strange on her tongue, after so long. "Just a taste, if you would be so kind." (Martin, 1997: 542)

Qohor, Valyrian, Lys, Myrish, and Norvos are made up places, they have their own language. Although Martin invents the names of places that sounds "not English" in order to strengthen the formula of epic fantasy, the language they use does not experience a lot of variation.

In order to make the epic convincing, Martin is careful in describing the age of the character. Robb Stark, in the age of 14 already leads an army and later becomes the king of the North while his sister, Sansa, the eldest daughter in Stark family is 11 year old and becomes the future wife of Prince Joffrey, who is 12 year old. Jon Snow, the illegitimate son of Eddard Stark is in his 14. When compared with today reality, those ages are too young to have responsibility as leaders and they are even not in marriageable age. Since they are from old days, such depiction is justifiable. Beside the age, number of characters is also important factor in making the epic fantasy more convincing. At least there are 182 characters in the story. They all have names and even the dead character, at least 32 characters, and minor characters like guards also have names.

Martin's *A Game of Thrones* is not the only novel dealing with a lot of characters. Other epic fantasy like *Lords of the Rings* performs the same. With a lot of characters, the writer not only has freedom in creating the world of fantasy more convincingly, but also has a way in making the grandiose story. The problem raised with such quantity is in the plot structure of the narrative. That explains why the ending of *A Game of*



*Throne* is not satisfactory. When the dragon eggs hatched, the readers must be curious what happen with Daenerys. Robb Starks, Jon Snow, Sansa Stark, and Prince Joffrey also just begin their stories. The readers are left without any certain ending.

Moral or value standard cannot be separated from life. Since a work of literary art is an imitation of life, it cannot negate such standard as a code of conduct of the characters. It is also through this moral standard that a theme can be built by the plot. Along with development of how people view life, the value standard also goes with it. With this idea it can be said that standard of value is not absolute. It depends on people's need at certain time in certain place. Therefore, it can be argued that value standard on which a story is based must be the value standard that the writer holds or the value that the author perceives as the standard of value of the people. The hero of *A Game of Thrones* who is supposed to be the value bearer does not perform as one. The value standard seems to be negated. There is no value that should be protected or fight for. The driving force for leading their lives is not the moral itself but his purpose, which are political rather than ideal. Every character, whether he is good or bad, has justification of his action.

Each has good and bad sides. It depends on justification of the action. The death of Eddard Stark seems to symbolize the death of criteria of good deeds. The only motif in joining the war for the thrones is political one. Establishing order in society can be the motif behind Robb Stark when he wants to fight the Lannisters but his motif can be also a revenge over the death of his father, Eddard Stark. Robb Stark's motif can also come from his moral obligation as the oldest son in the family when the family is threatened to be eliminated by King Joffrey. The sinful Jaime Lannisters has a heroic capacity because he tries so hard to defend his family. Tyrion Lannister, the coward and opportunistic individual also has the capacity of caring although his motif is only to benefit himself.

Although celebrating reason is noticeable in the story, the gods still persist. This fact shows

that Martin cannot escape from the fundamental driving force of man's existence. This can be seen in the following quotations:

The gods of Winterfell kept a different sort of wood. It was a dark, primal place, three acres of old forest untouched for ten thousand years as the gloomy castle rose around it. It smelled of moist earth and decay. ... This was a place of deep silence and brooding shadows, and the gods who lived here had no names (Martin, 1997:29).

For her sake, Ned had built a small sept where she might sing to the seven faces of god, but the blood of the First Men still flowed in the veins of the Starks, and his own gods were the old ones, the nameless, faceless gods of the greenwood they shared with the vanished children of the forest (Martin, 1997:29).

The above quotations shows the existence of the gods. They not only exist but are also present in their lives. When Princess Daenerys should face calamity due to the death of her husband Khal Drogo, she blames the gods for her suffering: "What had she ever done to make the gods so cruel?" (Martin, 1997: 528). Catelyn also does the same.

*These are the ones who keep the old gods*, she realized. She asked herself what gods she kept these days, and could not find an answer. It would not do to disturb them at their prayers. The gods must have their due ... even cruel gods who would take Ned from her, and her lord father as well. So Catelyn waited (Martin, 1997:722).

*A Game of Thrones* is human product. It is, therefore, not an autonomous area of human experience with significant impact from political, economic and other forms of social behavior. When a novel becomes best-seller, gains many award, and is remade into many different forms, it must be because it contains elements that embody values and attitudes that its readers wish to see affirmed. Therefore, the popularity implies some kind of psychological wish fulfillment of the reader. This means that violence created in the novel, one way or another, reflects what the readers want. According to Smith: "Value



judgments appear to be among the most fundamental forms of social communication and also among the most primitive benefits of social interaction." (2001:4). Smith's opinion justifies why *A Game of Thrones* is like a fascination toward violence, intrigue, sex, war, and power. Celebrating natural impulse of power, sex, and violence as displayed by Martin through *A Game of Thrones* can then be regarded as moral. It is contradictory with generally common belief that the acts of a person who is subject to his natural impulses cannot be classed as moral.

Something moral is formulated by reason not by feeling because the first stage of moral being—of one whose acts can be classed as good or bad morally—is when he is capable of distinguishing between good and bad actions. What distinguish permissible violence from illegal one lies in the motif behind the violence. A closer look at the novel will show how the shift in underlying elements was related to changing attitudes toward violence. In primitive society, when men's concern is around getting food by using their physical power, bloodshed became the only solution to settle up the dispute. Although physical power are still used tremendously in *A Game of Thrones*, this epic fantasy displays what is commonly found in modern society like, negotiation, trick, intrigue, and strategy.

## CONCLUSION

*A Game of Thrones* is seen as moving away from traditional epic fantasy although in some cases certain formulas still remain. The development of rational thought may provide the reason for the changing attitude toward moral fantasy as displayed by *A Game of Thrones*. The most noticeable change is in the depiction of heroines who play more important roles and the attitude toward moral values. The gradual changes do not necessarily show that Martin as the author and the readers move away from traditional epic fantasy novel because some characteristics still persist. The main reason for the sustainability of epic fantasy characteristics is that this kind of story still fascinates readers

while the reason for the invention is the development of society. Violence, moral ambiguity, and sexuality become the way the novel appeals to the readers. The success of *A Game of Thrones*, however, does not depend only on them. It also depends on the way George Martin verbalizes them by smart combination of old and new formula.

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